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Historic Pubs of London, Oxford, Edinburgh
Teresa S. Welsh, Ph.D.

For centuries pubs have been places where friends and colleagues meet, a place where people gather to celebrate, play games, or relax. Many pubs offer accommodations as well as food and drink and in rural areas pubs often also serve as the local post office. The term "pub" (an abbreviation of "public house") was popularized by the Victorians as they were a local gathering place in British communities and small towns, a tradition that continues today.

The owner or manager (licensee) of a public house is known as the publican or landlord. Each pub generally has its own group of regulars, people who drink regularly at their *local*. In many cases, it is the pub in their neighborhood, but some people choose their local for its proximity to work or friends, for availability of a particular ale, or darts team.

Roman Tabernae to British Taverns

Inhabitants of Great Britain have been brewing and drinking ale since the Bronze Ages. The province of Britannia and its capital *Londinium* were ruled by the Romans almost 2,000 years ago. Romans were great builders of roads that connected *tabernae*, which served food, wine, and local ale. These *tabernae* displayed vine leaves outside to advertise their trade.

After the Romans left, alehouses became common, as ale was safer than water, which was becoming increasingly polluted with an expanding Medieval population. In 1393, King Richard II ordered: "Whosoever shall brew ale in the town with intention of selling it must hang out a sign; otherwise, he shall forfeit his ale." These signs were to make them easily visible to the mostly illiterate populace and to the king's ale inspectors.

In Medieval times, many taverns were run by monks who offered travelers shelter, food, and drink. Monks grew barley in fields owned by monasteries and they brewed and sold ale as a funding source, so it was natural that they should also operate many of the taverns. Many historic British pubs are built on land that was once part of a monastery such as Blackfriars (Figure 1).

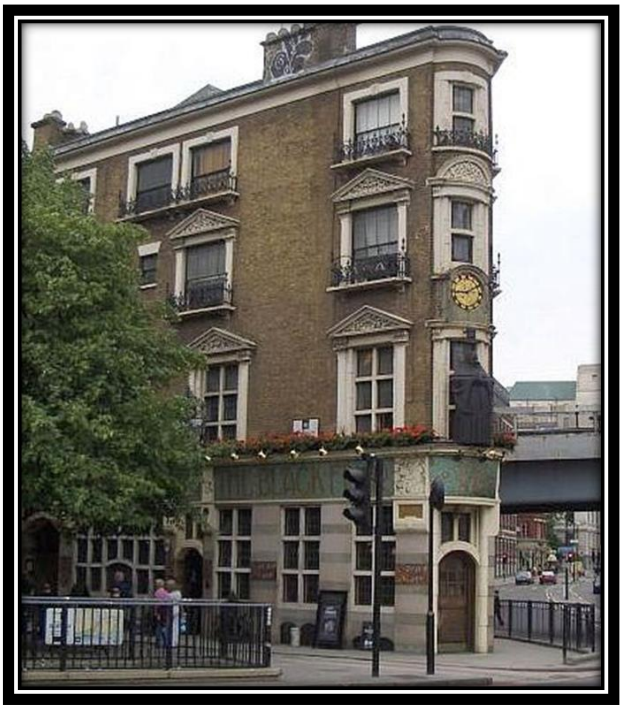

Figure 1. Blackfriars Pub
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2014)

Probably the most famous of the London inns was **The Tabard**, in Southwark, next to the George and Dragon. It was here Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1345-1400) began *The Canterbury Tales*:

> *In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay*
> *Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage*
> *To Caunterbury with ful devout corage…*

According to quotes attributed to English author and lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1709-1784):

> *No, Sir; there is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn.* (Boswell, 1791, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*)

> *As soon… as I enter the door of a tavern, I experience an oblivion of care and a freedom from solicitude: when I am seated, I find the master courteous, and the servants obsequious to my call; anxious to know and ready to supply my wants: wine there exhilarates my spirits, and prompts me to free conversation and an interchange of discourse with those whom I most love.* (Hawkins, 1787, *Life of Samuel Johnson*)

Pubs on Fleet Street, London

The Old Cock Tavern, 22 Fleet Street, originally built before the 17th Century, was restored using historical photographs after a fire in the 1990's. Samuel Pepys, Alfred Tennyson, and Charles Dickens were patrons (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Old Cock Tavern
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2013)

Punch Tavern, 99 Fleet Street has a unique decorated skylight and images of Punch & Judy, since it was the staff watering-hole of the satirical magazine *Punch* and Punch and Judy shows were performed at nearby Ludgate Circus. Their cheddar fries are recommended (Figure 3).

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, Wine Office Court, 145 Fleet Street, well-known in the 17th century, was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and rebuilt the following year. The pub's vaulted cellars are thought to belong to an earlier 13th century Carmelite Monastery. A portrait of one of the Cheese's most famous patrons, Dr. Samuel hangs on a far wall, and his chair set upon a shelf. Dr. Johnson, James Boswell, Voltaire, Thackeray and Charles Dickens (originally a Fleet St. journalist) drank here, and he referred to this pub in *A Tale of Two Cities* (www.pubs.com).

Figure 3. Punch Tavern
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2013)

Old Bank of England Pub, 194 Fleet Street, has a reportedly grisly connection with the past - it is between the site of Sweeney Todd's barber shop and Mrs. Lovett's pie shop. Supposedly, the tunnels and vaults below the building were where Todd's victims were butchered before being cooked in Mrs. Lovett's pies. The Old Bank of England Pub is open weekdays but closed on weekends, and it is near the Royal Courts of Justice (Figure 4, Figure 5).

Figure 4. Old Bank of England Pub Interior
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2010)

Figure 5. Old Bank of England Pub Exterior
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2010)

Figure 6. St. Bride's Tavern
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2011)

Other Pubs of Interest in London (www.pubs.com)

The Olde Ship British Pub & Restaurant, St. Mary Overie Dock, Cathedral Street, on South Bank of the Thames has great food and is next to a full-scale reconstruction of Sir Francis Drake's world-famous sailing galleon, the Golden Hind, a great photo op site that is open 7 days a week for self-guided tours (http://www.goldenhind.co.uk/).

St. Brides Tavern, located on a side street near Blackfriars, was originally opened for the workers on St. Bride's Church, which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and re-built after the Great Fire of London in 1666. The spire of St. Bride's was the inspiration for the tiered wedding cake (Figure 6, Figure 7).

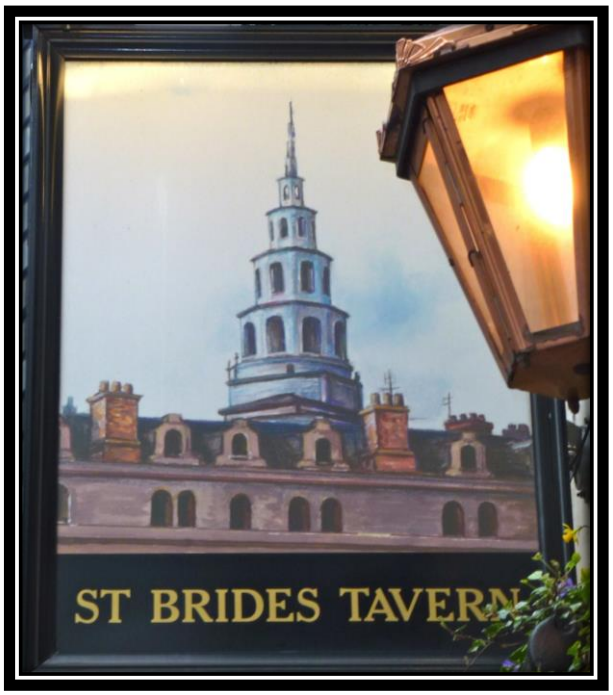

Figure 7. Pub Sign of St. Brides Church Spire,
the inspiration for the tiered wedding cake
(www.stbridestavern.co.uk/)

Sherlock Holmes Pub, 10-11 Northumberland Street, Westminster, near Charing Cross Station, is a beautiful old pub that is full of Sherlock Holmes memorabilia. It's a great place to visit or photograph (www.sherlockholmespub.com/) (Figure 8, Figure 9).

Figure 8. Sherlock Holmes Pub
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2009)

Figure 9. Sherlock Holmes Restaurant above the Pub
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2016)

… and if you are a Sherlock Holmes fan, complete the experience by visiting the Sherlock Holmes Museum at 221B Baker Street near the Baker Street Tube Station (www.sherlock-holmes.co.uk/) (Figure 10, Figure 11)

Figure 10. Sherlock Holmes Museum
221b Baker Street, London
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2009)

Figure 11. Sherlock Holmes Museum
Visiting with "Dr. Watson" (2009)

Ten Bells Pub, corner of Commercial Street and Fournier Street in Spitalfields has been here since at least 1752. Once known as "The Jack the Ripper" since many of his victims frequented it, the interior has a large sign listing the Ripper's victims and they sell a variety of Jack the Ripper souvenirs (www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com/locations/ten-bells-pub/).

Favorite Pubs, Oxford

The Eagle and Child Pub, dated to 1650 and known to locals as the "Bird and Baby," was where "The Inklings" J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and other writers at Oxford frequently met for lunch to critique each other's work (Figure 12, Figure 13).

Figure 12. The Eagle and Child Pub, Oxford
Headquarters of "The Inklings"
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2011)

Figure 13. Eagle and Child Pub "Inklings Corner"
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2016)

Figure 14. White Horse Pub, Oxford
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2013)

The White Horse Pub, across from the University of Oxford Bodleian Library, was said to be a favorite of Winston Churchill. Recommended…. the crispy and delicious Chicken Schnitzel (Figure 14).

Favorite Pubs, Edinburgh, Scotland

Figure 15. Deacon Brodie's Tavern, Edinburgh
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2013)

Deacon Brodie is thought to be the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Deacon Brodie, a seemingly respectable carpenter, was found that he led a double life and at night was a criminal and thief. He was hanged in 1788 (Figure 15). www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-31018496

Figure 16. Greyfriars Bobby's Tavern, Edinburgh
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2013)

Greyfriars Bobby statue and Tavern, located near Greyfriars Kirkyard (graveyard) in Edinburgh, is named for an inspirational story of a small Skye terrier so devoted to his master that he would not leave his graveside. The story was subject of numerous children's books and a 1961 Disney movie. It is said to be good luck to rub the statue's nose (https://scotlandwelcomesyou.com/greyfriars-bobby/) (Figure 16, Figure 17).

Figure 17. Greyfriars Kirkyard, Edinburgh
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2013)

Not exactly a pub but a favorite tea and coffee shop, The Elephant House, located just up the street from Greyfriars Bobby, claims to be "The Birthplace of Harry Potter," a place J.R. Rowling frequented to stay warm while writing her first novel. Great hot chocolate, pastries, soup, sandwiches, and a wonderful view from the back windows of Greyfriars Kirkyard and Edinburgh Castle (www.elephanthouse.biz/) (Figure 18, Figure 19).

Figure 18. The Elephant House, Edinburgh
(photo by T.S. Welsh, 2008)

Figure 19. Edinburgh Castle, view from The Elephant House rear window (photo by T.S. Welsh, 2009)

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